Civilians flee fighting in midwest

Reports from Rolpa indicate the fighting this week between joint security forces and the Maoists was more fierce than previously reported, with large numbers of civilians fleeing the area.

Security officials here told us that about 100 rebels were killed in clashes around the Maoist training areas in Bhanuwal, 15km northwest from the district headquarters of Libang. Fifty-six Maoist bodies have been recovered so far. They also said reinforcements had been flown into the area and it was under army control.

Some police officers who arrived here Thursday morning from near the scene of the fighting said the army had fired at rebel positions from helicopters and reported many civilian casualties in Bhanuwal. The army says five soldiers were killed, but so far the bodies of only two policemen have been brought down to Nepalganj. Security officials have been unusually tight-lipped about combat details.

As news of the fighting in Rolpa spread, villagers from other midwestern districts have started fleeing their homes. But their movement has been restricted because of the three-day bandh. Thirty-year-old Tanka Budathoki of Dang was given two choices: join the Maoists or die. He says he has no other option but to go to India and find a job. Raji Sejuwal's eyes glint as he recounts how he left his village in Jumla to try to get into the army. He was rejected, and now he can't go back because the Maoists are after him. He hopes to get recruited. Harka Bahadur Biswakarma from Sunhet returned from India to celebrate Dashain with his family, but is going right back.

There is just too much bloodshed and fear in my village, Pari Ashikar from Jajarkot came down to Nepalganj to catch a bus to India and is walking across the border. He told us: “I am not going to come back until there is permanent peace in my country.”

"Not that it bothered me. From what I hear, the worst thing that could happen is paying off the Maoists,” says Hofkamp. “Maybe they'll give me a discount!”

A number of tourists we spoke to in Thamel told us their Nepal tour operators seemed more worried about their safety than they were. “Initially when I was home the news made me nervous, but now I’m not worried at all,” says Siobhan O’Reilly who plans to mountain-bike from Lhasa through Kodari to Kathmandu.

Arii Ocidenarrde and Bianca Vanderwal were quite annoyed when the locals constantly reminded them of potential dangers. “Most of them told us not to go out of the Valley. They were being overcautious,” says Ocidenarrde. “I’ll encourage my people to visit Nepal because there’s nothing to worry about,” says Vanderwal.

For Israeli tourists Owen Bromberg and his girlfriend, the conflict is the least of their concerns. They still think Nepal is safer than India, or Israel. “We didn’t take any local guides, they say. “This is nothing like the suicide bombers we face in our streets, adds Bromberg. The two are headed on a month-long trek to Annapurna Base Camp.

Even American tourists don’t feel particularly threatened. “You hear a lot rumour at home and especially Bangkok, but the feeling is different here. Tourists need to come here and find out for themselves,” says Meg Anderson, who left, who called herself a global adventure traveller. Meg and her friends are now already on their way to Everest Base Camp. “Thank God! I don’t like Americans, we’re not like Spanish,” says her friend Ryan Smith, laughing. He is unfazed by the recent news of Maoist harrassment, and threats against Americans. “I wouldn’t worry so much about it, and miss out the great adventure that is Nepal.”

See also: Doom and gloom in Thamel, p 4-5
NEPALI TIMES

NEPALI RESILIENCE

N epalis have never been as despondent about their future as they are now. Yet, with Daizai and Thar around the corner, we must try to restore some of our lost self-esteem. Not the deceptive optimism in an elusive peace, but bringing back a sense of realistic faith in our own resilience and inner strength as a people.

Nepal is the oldest nation-state in the subcontinent. It has a remarkable capacity for bouncing back which manifests itself during traumatic periods of its history. True, our national institutions have been weakened by political interference, neglect and, it must be said, we have rarely had the rulers we deserved. But this is also a society and a nation that has an innate ability to rebound in an instant. We just need the occasional visionary to tide us over bad times. The very fact that such a saviour has not arrived must indicate that things are not as bad as we think they are.

The foundations of national identity built over the last two centuries are strong. We may not agree on what that identity is exactly, but a sense of Nepalihood courses in our veins. A decade of democracy has now laid roots deep enough to help us recover our strength as a people.

Nepal’s strength comes from the diversity that makes us a whole. We are stronger than the sum of our parts. It is like the story of the old man who asks his sons to break a stick, and then asks them to break a bundle of twigs. There is still a lot of inequality and exclusion, but we have the mechanism to mend that because the people have learnt to be in charge. In the end, it is decentralised local self-governance that is going to make possible economic progress which all Nepalis can share.

When the right ingredients (leadership, an accountable and receptive government, an energised citizenry) come together, Nepal takes rapid strides. We can see this in forestry, small-hydropower, the spread of community radio, the rapid acceptance of biogas for home fuel—all fields in which Nepal is a model for other developing countries. The emergence of Nepal as a centre for medical education, management colleges and universities is a harbinger of our transition into a service economy that can take advantage of our location and climate. The professionalism of our tourist industry is of exportable quality.

The management and the staff of the hotel are waiting to meet you, mangle the preconceived script, meet the people and the story plain and simple. That’s the idea. This is the reason we have decided to bring this particular multinational newsmagazine here. A decade of democracy has now laid roots deep enough to help us recover our strength as a people. Nepal’s strength comes from the diversity that makes us a whole. We are stronger than the sum of our parts. It is like the story of the old man who asks his sons to break a stick, and then asks them to break a bundle of twigs. There is still a lot of inequality and exclusion, but we have the mechanism to mend that because the people have learnt to be in charge. In the end, it is decentralised local self-governance that is going to make possible economic progress which all Nepalis can share.

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LETTERS

BABURAM

Your translation of Baburam Bhattarai’s opinion (From the Nepal Press, #162) gave me a clear view of what the Maoists are after. It showed they are against the whole concept of the ‘Kingdom of Nepal’, the monarchy and democratic, multi-party parliamentary system. Bhattarai says it was the monarchy that led to the downfall of the Nepali people and that the monarchy should take responsibility for this doom. I have a few questions:

- Where would we be if it was not for King Prithvi’s Shal’s unification campaign?
- Would there be anything called a Nepal?

Baburam also has to answer the question: will this country turn to Singapore overnight if the king quits the throne? Why is a republic so important? Why are these people who are lighting a war in the peoples’ name so afraid to face the people in an election or referendum? We need answers. It is clear from Baburam’s piece that the Maoists are after a throw out the king and rule the country themselves. If another round of talks are held, the people will speak out, and by people I don’t mean the budhujbis and nagarik samaj speaking on their behalf, but the people directly. The people also need to tell the political parties that if they had not wasted the years after 1990, we would not be in this mess. The Maoists are on a path of self-destruction and if they continue on this track they will take the country down with them.

YK Sharma, Baneshwor

GOVERNMENT

I appreciate the idea of including Maoists in development (Involve Maoists in development? #162) although I doubt its practical feasibility in terms of implementation. Theoretically, the logic is required to address the politics of exclusion at the grassroots level, let the stakeholders feel part of the development process and makes the benefit of development accessible to everyone, irrespective of their political belief. The main question, however, is how is this going to happen? Unless the Maoists are brought into the political mainstream at the national level, it is almost impossible to imagine that they would agree to work together with the government or other political parties at the local level. So if we really worry about delivering the fruits of development to everyone, we should concentrate on first solving the Maoist crisis.

Poshendra Satyal, Cambridge, UK

- I am aghast at the naivety shown by foreign donors in Nepal. How on earth is the government going to involve the Maoists in development, when the Maoists have said that they don’t want to be involved? In the Maoist ‘base areas’ we have seen that development is the least of their priorities. Their priorities are extortion, forced recruitment of child soldiers and killing or driving out anyone who does not believe in their ideology. Nepal’s donors need to dump development projects in Maoist stronghold areas.

SB Thapa, Kathmandu

- Navin Singh Khadka describes the resistance of the government and the Maoists to several of Nepal’s donor agencies’ proposals to restart development projects in Maoist stronghold areas. The resistance of the government exasperates its military-based formula for national-security: a top-down approach. What the donor agencies are proposing is a bottom-up approach to establish security and peace in Nepal that looks beyond traditional security definitions.

In Nepal and many other nation-states, military-centered conceptions of national-security predominate. Typically when the stability of a state fails, even from internal threats, the state’s military role is to ‘secure’ the nation through an exercise of power. Currently in Nepal, curfews, checkpoints and ‘armed encounters’ are some of the manifestations of security measures. However, for the people of Nepal, disease, hunger and poverty prevail as causes of destabilisation and insecurity. In addition, children raised in a culture of violence and the dissolution of family structures are emerging threats to human security.

Seeking security from a traditional military-centered approach begs the question, security for whom? The proposition of various donor agencies to resume development projects in the Maoist controlled regions with the involvement of Maoists is progressive to say the least, and precisely what is needed. The insecurity of the people of Nepal can not be understood by the same military-centric approach that is failing over society at present. Individuals fit into the broader structures of war and violence differently to governments and the ruling elite. What is military action against internal unrest except a method of stabilising state structures and protecting the positions of the ruling elite? It does little for the faltering human condition.

At the same time, perhaps the Maoists should consider expanding their mode of revolution, as they too have appeared non-supportive of the donor agencies’ proposal. The suggestion here is not that the traditional military-based mode of security is unnecessary but that it is not sufficient to deal with conflicts that stem from identity politics and economic deprivation. Since the violence has grown from the ground-up, wouldn’t it make more sense to address it in the same manner?

Carolyn Rodal, Kirtipur

ANNI

Amidst is an association of graduates from China, and we believe in deeds more than words. Which is why our contributions to Nepal-China relations have not reached the ears of Mark Turn and Sara Shneiderman (‘Yams in Boulderland’, #161). We are the sole organisation involved in erecting the statue of Arniko at the White Pagoda premises in Beijing. It is the first figure of a Nepali personally installed at a public place in China, and 85 percent of the cost was borne by the Amiko Society and the remaining by Himalayan Bank. Nepal Tourism Board and Royal/Nepal Airlines helped in the week long Nepal Festival following the unveiling of the statue. Please visit our site, arnikosociety.com for details. Our next project is to install a statue of Marjanshree in China’s Wutai mountains. We welcome contributions.

LK Thapa, Amiko Society

MISS NEPAL

I did not watch the Miss Vatika Beauty Pageant live on MTV, but what I witnessed the next day were three very worthy Nepal women defending their titles once again to the mother of all judges, the host (what’s his face?) of the talk show Bahas. Yes, Nepal is in deep crisis, there is violence and conflict. Nepal is burning, so what are we supposed to do, jump into the flames? Shouldn’t those who can at least try to get the country moving with new plans and creative ideas? As the new Miss Nepal rightly told the talk show host: “Look up to us.” Bravo. Who knows, the country may actually celebrate a day of ceasefire if she is crowned Miss World.

Alok Maskey, Dhopighat

THE FINEST WINES IN KATHMANDU

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Alok Maskey, Dhopighat
J ust when it was beginning to rebound after the ceasefire and the publicity surrounding the 50th anniversary of the first ascent of Mt Everest, Nepal’s tourism is in a tailspin again. Now with news of violence, curfews and bandhs, tour groups are cancelling their Nepal holidays and the figures for arrivals in 2003 are likely to fall to 150,000—the lowest since 1998. Even though no tourists have been harmed in the past seven years of conflict and most trekking areas are as safe as they have always been, international media coverage of the insurgency has made tourists nervous.

“It is not that the tourists are afraid to visit Nepal,” one Kathmandu tour operator told us. “But they want us to guarantee tourists from the US, UK and other western Nepal told us Maoists were unable to do.” The travel industry says only one thing will save it now: a joint declaration by Maoists and the army that trekking will not be harmed. Cancellations for the autumn season are coming in thick and fast, spreading the doom and gloom in tourist areas like Thamel.

After 15 years in the business, Sanat Shrestha is planning to shut his tours and trekking office in Thamel. Twenty people who worked to make Explore Alpine Adventure the successful venture it once was, will be out of their jobs. “I don’t know what am I supposed to do now. Tourism is the only thing I know,” says one of his staff. Even Shrestha is unsure about his future. “I don’t know where to invest anymore, I don’t know where to go,” he says.

At the beginning of August, Shrestha’s autumn bookings were looking good. He had 80 German and Norwegian groups coming in. Last week, all 80 groups cancelled. Shrestha was shattered and that was when he decided that he had to close. “I had no other option,” he told us. He needs a minimum of Rs 100,000 every month for rent, staff salaries and other recurring expenses.

After the January ceasefire, Nepali tour operators were surprised by the volume of bookings from the US, which had suffered heavily since September 2001. But when Maoists started their strong-arm American rhetoric, as they broke the ceasefire, it scared the Americans again. A trekking guide who recently returned from western Nepal told us that Maoists warned him against bringing tourists from the US, UK and Belgium.

Although they know that the end of the ceasefire was to blame, many tour operators lash out at some Kathmandus based embassies for their over-cautious advice. Ang J. Sherpa, president of Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA), agrees: “I was in Germany when the ceasefire was still on, but I was surprised to hear from the consular generals that they did not get the correct information from Nepal.” When in London recently, Sherpa was surprised by the positive interest that a lot of people displayed, thanks in part to the Everest Golden Jubilee earlier this year. Queries and bookings for adventure tourism poured in.

In fact, mountaineering is the only silver lining for this autumn season. More than 100 expeditions are still coming to Nepal, buoyed by the Everest publicity. Larger trekking agencies and clients, however, are holding off. Nepal Tourism Board and private trekking offices invested a lot of money on promotional tours and exhibitions abroad during the ceasefire. Honds spent millions on reeducating and renovations to welcome who they hoped would be the first of a sides of tourists during Dasai and Tihar. Now, it’s a grim situation, especially for those who took out loans for the business that is not going to come.

“I don’t know how we’re going to cope with this. If the problem persists, what is the next step for us?” Raja Sakyo of the legendary Kathmandu Guest House asks no one in particular.

This is the oldest budget hotel in Thamel, one that set the trend for a new kind of tourism in Nepal in

Gloom and doom in Thamel

The end of the ceasefire has wiped out Nepal’s autumn tourist season.
Pessimism in Pokhara

Most Pokhara hotels are still. Rs 1,000 “revolutionary tax” to Maoists at Birenhari hasn’t helped matters, and the word is spreading of Maoist harassment along the trails.

Some of Pokhara’s tourism entrepreneurs have left for America or Europe. “If it goes on like this, I’ll leave too,” says the ex-chairman of the Hotel Association here, Sundar Kumar Shrestha. Many hotels are not even able to pay their electricity bills. Pokhara’s largest hotel, Tulipary, owes the NEA Rs 10.8 million and recently had its electricity cut off. The hotel now uses a generator. In the past 15 years, fed by a tourism boom, 300 new hotels were built here to cater to the annual 100,000 visitors. This year, the number is expected to be less than half. Says Biplab Poudel of the Hotel Association: “There used to be a time when all rooms in all hotels were booked. As soon as we took out bank loans and added rooms, the tourists stopped coming.”

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“Ring for Peace” 21 September

A coalition of groups working to declare Nepal children a zone of peace is organising a Nepal-wide campaign to ring bells for two minutes at noon on Sunday, 21 September, which is International Peace Day. Called “Ring for Peace” the organisers have asked all Nepalis to take part, ringing temple bells, bells at home, bicycle bells, car horns to call for an end to conflict and violence. "Whoever wins or loses, the most affected by conflict are children, we want to draw the Nepal public’s attention to the plight of children," the coalition says in a statement. Information about the bell-ringing campaign is being broadcast on Radio Nepal, television stations and a network of FM stations throughout the country.

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Full disclosure

The National Human Rights Commission is under international pressure to make public the reports it commissioned on the alleged human rights violations by security forces in Doramba at Ramechhap district, and by Maoist rebels in Panchthar and Sirmada. The heads of mission of the EU in Kathmandu called on NHRC Chairman Nayan Bahadur Khatri Tuesday requesting the report be made public. The Royal Nepal Army has reopened its investigation into the 25 August Doramba incident in which 19 people, most of them Maoists, were killed. “The team has already started its work,” a senior army official told us. An earlier army report had said the rebels in Doramba were killed in two separate encounters but the Maoists say they were executed after capture.

Dream’s little restaurant.

This should be the season in which Pokhara is filling up with trekkers bound for the Annapurnas. The restaurants by the lakeside should be full, the airport should be humming with activity. Not this year. More than most other big towns in Nepal, Pokhara’s fortunes are tied with tourism. With the ceasefire, hopes were high that tourists would return and they had started trickling back. Indian tourists had come to Pokhara since May and kept the rooms occupied. Although there have been no major attacks in Pokhara since the ceasefire broke down three weeks ago, the traffic has already fallen off. Reports that trekkers have been forced to pay "revolutionary tax" to Maoists at Birenhari hasn’t helped matters, and the word is spreading of Maoist harassment along the trails. Some of Pokhara’s tourism entrepreneurs have left for America or Europe. “If it goes on like this, I’ll leave too,” says the ex-chairman of the Hotel Association here, Sundar Kumar Shrestha. Many hotels are not even able to pay their electricity bills. Pokhara’s largest hotel, Tulipary, owes the NEA Rs 10.8 million and recently had its electricity cut off. The hotel now uses a generator. In the past 15 years, fed by a tourism boom, 300 new hotels were built here to cater to the annual 100,000 visitors. This year, the number is expected to be less than half. Says Biplab Poudel of the Hotel Association: “There used to be a time when all rooms in all hotels were booked. As soon as we took out bank loans and added rooms, the tourists stopped coming.” (Ramesh Poudel in Pokhara)
Upper Karnali

Nepal Investment Bank (NIB) this week signed a 300MW Upper Karnali hydropower project. A team from India’s state-owned National Hydroelectric Power Corporation is returning next month for a site study in western Nepal. “By December, we must start work at the site,” NIB’s Yogendra Prasad told us. “We intend to complete the project in five years.” Already, there are hints of disagreement. Nepal’s Department of Electricity Development says NIB will be required to prepare a detailed project report of the 600MW Buthi Gandaki storage type project as a pre-condition for developing Upper Karnali. NIB’s Yogendra Prasad says this: “There is no such condition, very soon we will be signing a Memorandum of Understanding on Upper Karnali.”

NIB has also constructed the 14.3MW Devighat power plant in 1995 and the 60MW Kuchi project in Bhutan. The Indian company says it can generate electricity at five cents per unit for the Upper Karnali. If the project goes ahead, NIB will sell electricity to India’s National Power Trading Corporation, or to states bordering Nepal. “Getting the power will not be a problem at all,” says Prasad. But that is precisely what stalled a 750MW Nepal-Australian joint venture reservoir project on the West Setl for the past six years. Eutroent, an American company, gave up the 402MW Arun III project just because it could not strike a deal with India. The now bankrupt Enron Corp, another American company, too was unable to sign the PPA with India for the development of the 10,800MW Karnali Chisapani hydropower project.

Laurels

Nepal Investment Bank (NIB) this week earned the distinction of being the first Nepali-managed bank to win the prestigious ‘Bank of the Year 2003’ award from the London-based Financial Times magazine. The award is based on growth and performance in terms of capital, assets, return on equity, management quality and use of technology. The best banks in 140 countries and further categories dedicated to excellence and innovation every year are recognised.

Old boys’ network

Our ageist society just doesn’t get it: years do not add up to expertise.

In the West, governments are grappling with the enormous socio-economic impact of an ageing population. Society is basking the need to get the elderly back into the workforce so they can be productive in retirement. However, it is with pride and amusement that we observe this isn’t the case in Nepal. Here, elderly people—younger men to be more precise—still form the core of our society, calling all of the shots and dreams of the spiritual veneration for older people here. It is the young who have no clout and connection in Nepal. Now, how did we manage to get to this point? It is a grand design cunningly plotted and practiced over centuries by a new cologne Baldessarini in the market. The scent for not smelling divine during Dasai with Hugo Boss’ Plus dental cream and Pearl Gel will be available in four colours at Morang Auto works, the sole distributor for the company.

Looking at Nepal’s future with the WTO.

While the political parties were our courts arrest around Tribhuvan, Nepal became a WTO member. It made this Beed wonder whether a ruling multiparty government prone to party squabbles would have made our entry into The Club with so little fuss. To all intents and purposes, it seemed Nepal left us to divine intervention through Lord Padshahmita for this membership. So rarely has there been so little public debate on a subject of such importance to the national economy. Even the Maoist leadership had little to say about Nepal embracing the free market.

Although developing countries put up a formidable fight at Cancun to slow the sweeping processes, it looks like business as usual. The US and EU will have it their way and we should not labour under the illusion that the G-21 will rule. Like the dooms of international agreements that Nepal is part of, once again we concentrated more on getting our name on the dotted line than on judging how to make WTO membership work for us. “We all lead the efforts of some of the champions within the government bureaucracy who worked towards brokering the best deal for us, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. Rather than looking at what we stand to lose by our alliance with the WTO, let’s examine where we have the competitive advantage to exploit it. As the Beed is tiring of pointing out, having a market of a billion people each to the north and south of us and not being able to find a niche is strange. We should have been much better by now at inviting foreign capital and technology to utilise our natural resources and labour. The Nepal economy post-Catastrophe still remains the same. The floodgates are opening and it is partially up to us to use every advantage to make trade a two-way flow. We may face a deluge of Belgian ghis, Australian apples and Indian medocs but there must be a process reverse too. The world should also see more of Nepal’s popemus, carpers and every other mediocrity has been flipping us so desperately for the last five years.

The Beed doubts that we will have much of a say on WTO issues like farm subsidies and liberalising markets. Perhaps we need to be proactive toward implementing the agreed upon actions. This means getting more than 50 pieces of legislation amended or incorporated, changing the way government machinery like the Customs Department functions, introducing quality controls and other standards. Now is the time for our multilateral and bilateral partners to prove their genuine interest in the future of our country. A first step could be to take time off from issues like ‘conflict resolution’ and focus on opening up the service sectors that have been well protected for Nepali players. There has been a renaissance from the private sector to opening businesses that are for small-scale industries like handicrafts in Nepal. 

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The first cars brought into the Valley had to be carried in by armies of porters over Bhimphedi from the plains. The fuel also had to be ferried over the mountains by humans. Things have improved, but sometimes when landslides block the capital's arteries for weeks on end or when there's a three-day band, it seems we are back in the 1950s. Nevertheless, there has been a tremendous boom in the automobile market in Nepal in the past five years. Once toys of the rich and famous, cars today are becoming a necessity for the urban middle class Nepali as they seriously consider graduating from two-wheeler to four-wheeler. There is a whole range of vehicles and bank financing now available to suit every ego and every pocket.

Foreign car manufacturers from India, Malaysia, Japan, Korea and Europe are all represented here, attracted by the increased purchasing power of Nepali urbanites. Matched quite fortuitously with the mushrooming of banks, there is now a burst of car finance loans that put motor vehicles within the reach of far more people than previously. With other avenues of investment almost closed, banks are investing in hire and purchase schemes for cars.

Customers are eligible for a loan if their income meets a bank's Equal Monthly Installment. They have to make a 20 percent downpayment while bank puts up the rest. Payment periods vary from 12-60 months and banks will finance vehicles between Rs 300,000 to 5 million at an interest of 9.5-10.5 percent.

The bad news is that this trend has reduced the resale value of cars and the second-hand market. Five years ago, most buyers opted for reconditioned, today they go for airconditioned. Most shoot straight for brand new cars, usually minis. “In the old days, almost everyone went for reconditioned cars,” says Pashupati Rijadhari of International Auto Way Centre. “Those were the days when you used to get Japanese domestic models that were almost as good as new.”

The import ban on reconditioned cars and a heavy tax on second-hand cars have been introduced to stop the influx, says the Automobile Dealers Association. “But the choice finally depends on the availability of genuine parts and after-sales service.”

Car owners’ experience in the last few years show spare parts for cars with a bigger production scale are readily available. “The price varies with the kind of configuration you demand in a car,” says Rohini Thapaliya, President of Nepal Automobile Dealers Association. “But the choice finally depends on the availability of genuine parts and after-sales service.”

There are always exceptions. Brand loyalty is strong, and people will invest in a second-hand car with good resale value. Despite the seeming proliferation of fuel-guzzling SUVs, big cars have almost no market in the country, except for the super rich, foreign-aid projects and embassies. From market trends and from a casual assessment at any traffic jam, it does seem compacts are here to stay.

As a service to readers, Nepal Times got a team to test drive some of the models available, and frankly assess their performance and value. SUVs are reviewed below, sedans on pages 8-9 and small cars on page 10.

**Hyundai Santa Fe** ✿✿✿

“Experience the freedom,” say Hyundai about their Santa FE. And the freedom of driving this wonderfully responsive full time 4WD diesel is clear. In the hands of Test drivers: Gyan Amersariya, Area Manager Nepal for Qatar Airways and fellow Kathmandu-based Sri Lankan, Anuradha from the Pancos Institute South Asia, took our lineup of big and beautiful SUVs on test drives in Gorkarna last week.

As a service to readers, automobiles are reviewed below, sedans on pages 8-9 and small cars on page 10.

**Suzuki Grand Vitara** ★★★★

The compact size of the Grand Vitara brings this in line with the RAV 4 and CRV in compatibility with the average road in the Valley. If you’re buying a manual Grand Vitara, make sure you build up some upper body strength so you can get used to the gear shift. A petrol part time 4WD SUV, the Vitara has a good combination of safety and luxury features. A classy interior showcases this 2 litre engine to perfection. The Grand Vitara has ABS, a good turning circle and road holding.

Rs 3,500,000.

**Toyota RAV 4** ★★★★

The hugely popular RAV 4 could have been designed with Nepali roads in mind. This full-time 4WD with a 2 litre engine has plenty of grunt and gives a real sense of control. Road grip is good with excellent suspension, this is a reliable, comfortable and durable car, although slightly on the squashy side. At 148 BHP the RAV 4 is a very smooth and powerful engine. Options include wireless door lock, ABS, Radio/CD with 4 speaker system, key safety features like airbag for both passenger and driver and a rear window de-fogger. The interior and exterior styling complement each other perfectly, making this a very different product from the first generation of the Toyota RAV 4. “You’ve come a long way, baby!”

Rs 4,200,000.

**KIA Sorrento** ★★★★

The devil is in the details and the interiors of this SUV would get full marks from Beezieuibee himself: leather seats, a six-speaker audio system, LCD display and trip meter, overhead console plus back and rear seat armrests and power-controlled seats with a control panel on the wheel. I could almost live in this car. The Sorrento’s 2.5 litre diesel engine with 140 BHP is a part time 4WD CDi translates into 30 percent more power than other diesel engines, with 50 percent less noise and pollution. A beautifully smooth SUV with four disc brakes with ABS and EBS, but a slightly constricting turning radius. Considering the luxury features on offer with 26 options including a sunroof for maximum mountain vantage, the Sorrento is value for money.

Rs 3,710,000.

**Mahindra & Mahindra Scorpio** ★★★

The Scorpio suits the rugged terrain of Mustang or Zanskar more than Kathmandu Valley, but at the rate our roads are deteriorating, its time may have come. Clearly in a category all of its own, the Scorpio has a 2.6 litre turbo engine and is built like a tank. With 109 BHP this seven seater has all four disc brakes and a decent interior, and with a tag less than its Japanese and Korean cousins, the Scorpio is good value. Pack the tent and the sleeping bags and take that dirt track that heads straight up the mountains from the Phuli Highway.

Rs 2,600,000.

**Honda CRV** ★★★

Ooooh, if ever big was beautiful, this is it. With 150 BHP, the 2 litre engine has ‘twitch’ that is ideal for Nepali highways. The CRV has very impressive suspension and road hugging capability. Safety features include all four disc brakes with ABS and airbags for both passenger and driver. The CRV has a dashboard-based automatic transmission system with a new real-time four-wheel technology. The CRV is ideal for family outdoor activities what with a convertible table and a water bucket in the luggage area.

Rs 3,880,000.

**Hyundai Terracan** ✿

Perhaps the ideal ‘project vehicle’ for Nepal, the Terracan is best for heavy work and transportation requirements. With a 2.5 litre turbo charged diesel engine, this 7 seater workhorse is not a full time 4WD but it is one tough cookie. A pity that the makers didn’t pay as much attention to the inside. If you’re really keen to drive off into the wild blue yonder, don’t leave without the indispensable GPS navigation system. The Terracan’s recent launch south of the border means we won’t have to wait much longer.

Rs 3,551,000.
Fiat Sienna 1.6 ELX 4 ★★★
With an army of initials marching behind its name, this 16 valve, 4 cylinder implemented Italian car takes a whole lot of muscle to manoeuvre. It weighs approximately 100kg more than other cars and it resists the driver. I barely felt the power steering and after 15 minutes behind the wheel the old triceps earned a free workout. The big blessing of the Sienna is the phenomenal 220mm ground clearance, which is just the ticket when you find riverbed scree where there once used to be a road. Despite the Italian engine and gearbox, this car had more rough edges than suitable for a sedan. The Rs 1,850,000 (semi-option) price tag is way too much for this assembled gaddi.

Ford Ikon 1.6 Zxi ★★★
It was not the inability to glancefurtively at the side-view mirror to ensure that my mascara was in place that irked me but the fact that the Ford Ikon 1.6 did not come equipped with automatic mirror adjusters. For a 1600cc car the pick-up wasn’t great, maybe it had something to do with the powerful a/c gulping gas. The central locking, power steering and electronic fuel cap release worked well but one tends to take these as a given. Front leg-room was spacious enough and the instrument panel came armed with white reflectors yet the interior was tacky. The 45l fuel tank gave a decent 10km in the Valley but Rs 1,875,000 is rather steep for an Indian-assembled car with frumpish insides.

Tata Indigo ★★
The ambitious 1.4 diesel turbo charged engine is not a joyride and the plastic interiors did nothing to alleviate my woes. The diesel engine won’t burn a hole in your wallet but the pick-up had me gnashing my teeth—one doesn’t enjoy being overtaken by Safa tempos. With great difficulty, it gained momentum and hit 40km/h in third gear. I was almost smiling but it was back to second gear with another determined tempo cutting across from the wrong side. The clutch had a jack-in-the-box personality—every time I floored it, the pedal sprang back somewhat viciously. With 160mm of ground clearance there’s plenty of room underneath but it’s what on top that matters. Rs 1,650,000 (Full option)

Kia Rio ★★★
It rattles and hums. The trunk door reminds you every now and then that it is a Kia. It ratters and almost starts a little gallop, but take the Rio up any Ring Road incline and the pick-up dwindles, more so if you’re cruising with the a/c on high. There is a fine line between cabin comfort and more revs when you put the pedal to the metal. It’s easy to be kind to the 1300cc Rio, even with an exterior faintly reminiscent of a station wagon, hence the abundant trunk space. Pity about the ground clearance though. Any pothole could unhinge the bottom off this baby. Rs 1,529,000

Opel Corsa Sail ★★★
Opel deserve full marks for this hatchback design concept. The combination of a lightweight body and modern mechanical engineering delivers thrust throughout the rev range. The fuel efficiency is a noteworthy 10.6km/l and it’s a cinch to park in narrow spaces. The Opel’s McPherson strut front suspension gives it leverage compounded by the rear torsional stabiliser. Don’t let the size fool you, this dinky lil’ auto is revving to go. Rs 1,390,000
Hyundai Matrix ★★★★★
The 1.8 L D4H Hyundai Matrix fits right into the narrow bylanes of this overcrowded city. The interior is surprisingly large and spacious with ample head-space for tall people. The sturdy coil spring suspension is good enough to make the coffee holder actually do its job without spillages. The nose evokes style is very now and the elevation and wide windscreen made me feel like I was driving a mini SUV. The foldable rear-seats create enough space for a carsick dog and a baby pram. Rs 1,899,700

Nissan Sunny 1.6
Super Luxury ★★★★★
A mouthful of a name that easily spells luxury. The gear transmission is smooth and even with the aircon on full, the pick-up is effortless and gives about 11km/l on our roads. Cushioning every bump, the shock absorbers are unique and the modified GG engine provided ample levels of mid-range torque for smooth acceleration. Narrow spaces do not compromise the Super Saloon as it comes furnished with ample head-space for tall people. The sturdy coil spring suspension is good enough to make the coffee holder actually do its job without spillages. Narrow spaces do not compromise the Super Saloon as it comes furnished with ample levels of mid-range torque for smooth acceleration. Narrow spaces do not compromise the Super Saloon as it comes furnished with ample levels of mid-range torque for smooth acceleration.

Honda Civic ★★★★★
Maintaining its advanced status, the 1.5 transversely mounted SOHC 16 valve Civic has an edge over other sedans. The high levels of refinement and spaciousness keep it from looking and handling like a bulky roadrunner. Vamped with EPS (Electric Power Steering) and ABS (Anti-lock Brake System) the Civic guards against skids and slides. This is a wonderful responsive car and the brakes are sharp. Admittedly, Rs 2,600,000 is exorbitant but trust me, it’s worth it.

Toyota Echo ★★★★★
Very high tech, the Japanese have outdone themselves again. This 1300cc four door mini sedan is extraordinary. Rigged with the VVT-i engine exclusive only to Toyota, they have taken pains with every detail. The interior is spacious and unique with its trendy digital instrument display panel. The pick-up is amazing. Designed for the European market, the Echo certainly has style. The asking price of Rs 2,195,000 for this funky car is a fair price: after all it’s a Toyota. Put together a simple yet substantial design with advanced technology and Toyota know-how and voila! It’s an Echo.

Toyota Corolla ★★★★★
Plush interiors, minute attention to detail, superb talent safety features and you must be still being behind the wheel of a Toyota Corolla. This 4 door Xi sedan also has the VVT-i engine. Big without being bulky, sleek without appearing like a pimpmobile, the Corolla updates its old school crediblity with new age sensibility. Rs 2,590,000 sounds extravagant but it’s a small price to pay for a car that doesn’t cut corners when it comes to quality. The Corolla’s 160mm ground clearance and fuel efficiency of 12km/l had me humming along with the engine.

Mazda6 ★★★★★
Little wonder that the Mazda6 2000cc was the winner of Japan’s RJC Car of the Year. Fitted with a DOHC 16 valve engine, it is a truly exciting car to drive. This is what other cars should aspire to be. I barely felt the numerous potholes—the high front double wishbone suspension in the front and E-type multi links suspension at the rear ensured the smoothest drive possible. The gear transmission is effortless and drives from zero to 100kph in 9.7 seconds. The brake response time is faultless, making this a great ride either in the city or on the highways. With an engine that makes most car lovers salivate, the exterior and interior of the car is just as gorgeous. The Mazda6 is a true beauty and would turn heads anywhere in the world. Priced at Rs 2,896,000, the Mazda6 is far too expensive for most of us but, with due apologies to Browning, a girl’s reach should always exceed her grasp, or what’s a heaven for?
Test Driver: Mandil Pradhan is the founder of PartyNepal.com. He drives a white Maruti 800 (1995) but he'd swap it any day for a Fiat Palio.

Maruti 800 Std ★★★

The Maruti 800 is the most common compact in the Valley for a very good reason: it’s cheap and takes all the punishment that our roads dole out. The 800cc engine is just right for the Kathmandu streets and mileage is a healthy 15km/l. The 800’s economical price tag, readily available spare parts that are often cheaper than those of two wheelers and good resale value mean that it’s a popular brand. For that price you can’t expect power and comfort options but this little compact is manoeuvrable and parkable handy for any city driver.

Maruti 800 Std (Full option)

Rs 1,444,000 (Full option)

Maruti Alto LX ★★★

Performance and specifications wise, the Alto is very similar to the Zen but is a better looking and more comfortable car to drive. The bigger dashboard has a lot more room and the compartment is larger. The interiors are more elegant with the option of front power windows. In the end, however, this is yet another spin-off of the basic 800. Rs 698,700

Suzuki Ignis ★★★★★

This multi-compact with SUV features from Suzuki Japan has everything: a superb interior, smooth gear transmission, factory fitted cassette/CD player, central remote locking system, air-con and power windows. The quality of construction is almost flawless. Drivability is further strengthened by power steering, rear wiper and defogger and it has enough room for five. Hi-tech suspension takes care of the bumpy roads. The Ignis has airbags in the front seats and side impact beams on the doors. With a choice of a 1.4 and a 2wd and seven different shades, this is what I would pick. If I had the cash.

Hyundai Santro Zip Plus ★★★★★

As far as Indian minis are concerned, the Santro is top of the line. High quality plastic, moulded switches and the refined interior lend an air of quality. The spacious dashboard, cabin room and extra trunk space would come in handy for any city driver.

Fiat Palio 1.2 ELX ★★★★★

This multi-compact with SUV features from Suzuki Japan has everything: a superb interior, smooth gear transmission, factory fitted cassette/CD player, central remote locking system, air-con and power windows. The quality of construction is almost flawless. Drivability is further strengthened by power steering, rear wiper and defogger and it has enough room for five. Hi-tech suspension takes care of the bumpy roads. The Ignis has airbags in the front seats and side impact beams on the doors. With a choice of a 1.4 and a 2wd and seven different shades, this is what I would pick. If I had the cash.

Daihatsu Sirion ★★★★★

The Daihatsu Sirion is a comfortable car to drive. The high seat position made me feel totally in control, the acceleration is phenomenal for a 1000cc car and the fuel economy is excellent. Backed up by power steering, electric door mirror, power windows, central lock, dual airbag system, rear wiper and defogger this is one of the most affordable Japanese cars. Equally good for the rough galls as it is for the highways. Rs 1,525,000

Daihatsu Charade ★★★

Smaller than the Sirion but with virtually all of the same features. The slightly taller cabins are a little congested and the smaller tyre radius reduces ground clearance. The interiors look better than the Sirion and there are headrests on all four seats. Between the two in the Daihatsu stable, and given the price differential, I’d opt for a Sirion.

Rs 1,475,000

Tata Indica V2 (Diesel) ★★★

With great exterior styling, the Tata Indica is an attractive hatchback with high ground clearance. This fuel-efficient machine has a huge cabin with a foldable back seat that massively increases the trunk space. The Indica’s gearshift takes practice and the car doesn’t cope with bumpy streets very well. The plastic used in the interior feels cheap and the pick-up is sluggish. The noise level has always been the Indica’s biggest demerit but then again, it is a diesel engine.

Rs 1,317,000 (Full option including insurance and 1 year road tax)

Perodua 2003 ★★★

This is a real value for money mini. This 850cc Malaysian car with a Japanese engine boasts TAgm in the city. Handling the Perodua is easy owing to its size. It is so light, the wheel fell as if it had powered steering. The pick-up simply outshines other cars in its engine size. The one disadvantage of such a light car is a slight wobble at high speeds. Shifting between second and third gear takes a little getting used to because it cackles.

Rs 1,075,000

Suzuki Alto

This car has pedigree: assembled in India, its engine, microprocessor and gear box come from Italy and almost everything else is from Brazil. Great Bravado that makes a drive over potholes. The sturdy Italian-style interior compares with bigger cars. Almost zero engine noise inside, excellent handling and road grip at high speeds. No surprise that the Palio comes from the makers of the world’s best cars, Ferrari. Along with the usual features it also has an inertial fuel cut-off switch which interrupts fuel supply in the event of a collision. Road visibility from the driver’s seat is a problem because of the bulbous front.

Rs 1,444,000 (Full option)
The Lone Ranger

The Bush administration's policies bode ill for America, and the world, in the long run.

In 2001, President George W Bush misled the American people. He said that a tax cut that was not designed to stimulate the economy would stimulate it, and the American people believed him. But it did not. He told Americans that the large surpluses that were among President Clinton's legacies meant that the large trade deficit of the Reagan era led to a fiscal surplus, just as the twin fiscal and trade surpluses of the 1990s led to a fiscal surplus. Bush may trumpet free markets, just as Reagan did. But just as he may exceed Reagan in fiscal irresponsibility, so he may outflank Reagan in trade hypocrisy. The Bush administration has pushed forward tax cuts that lead to deficits while providing only a modest amount of stimulus. Equally worrying—both for America and the world—is the path which it is embarking: deficits as far as the eye can see.

Second, America's huge trade deficit may be a major source of global instability. Will the world continue to finance this deficit willingly, to put its money into a country with such a demonstrated lack of competence in macroeconomic management (to say nothing of the corporate, banking and accounting scandals)? What returns will they demand? In searching for others to blame, America may once again enter an era of protectionism, as it did under Reagan. Bush may trumpet free markets, just as Reagan did. But just as he may exceed Reagan in fiscal irresponsibility, so he may outflank Reagan in trade hypocrisy.

The Bush administration has pushed forward tax cuts that lead to deficits while providing only a modest amount of stimulus. Equally worrying—both for America and the world—is the path which it is embarking: deficits as far as the eye can see. The Bush administration's policies bode ill for America in the long run—and hence for the world.

By JOSEPH E STIGLITZ

Joseph E Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics, is Professor of Economics at Columbia University.

Linking suicide

In a world first, the Australian government has responded to pressure from a staunch Catholic senator and agreed to require the labelling of pharmaceutical products that were developed with the use of embryos or embryonic stem cells. The decision represents a major defeat for the pharmaceutical industry, which lobbied heavily against the legislation. The move came after the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), against any introduction of embryo utilisation for therapeutic purposes. The decision represents a major defeat for the pharmaceutical industry, which lobbied heavily against the legislation.
**Crocodile tears**

Daman Nath Dhungana in Miyankhan Sep-Oct 2003

There are ten reasons the talks failed:

1. We still don’t know what was agreed in the first round of talks in November 2001, who had agreed to what and whether these agreements were fulfilled.
2. There was no sense of urgency or seriousness about setting up a Code of Conduct monitoring committee.
3. We still don’t know why or on whose instructions the army reneged on the agreement on the five km limit.
4. His Majesty added two more facilitators to the Nepaliga and myself, which no one was comfortable with. From my point of view, our role was limited and made ineffective.
5. The Maoist side repeatedly raised the issue of direct talks with the king, rather than with a government with or without executive powers. But we still don’t know what was agreed in the first round.
6. There was no sense of urgency or seriousness about setting up a Code of Conduct monitoring committee.
7. From my point of view, our role was limited and made ineffective.
8. The Thapa government’s negotiating team in Nepaliga was not just a formality, but its concept paper did not give the Maoists the concessions to stay on in talks. They warned about this repeatedly.
9. The Maoists alleged in a letter that the army executed stay on in talks. They warned about this repeatedly.
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**Quote of the Week**

"We have not had any response from the King and the Maoists to restart talks."

Daman Nath Dhungana in Mulyankan Sep-Oct 2003

**killer instinct**

UML leader Madhuchh Prajhat in Kanchipur, 13 September

For years, supporters of the old regime have been trying to protect its existence by hook or by crook. But now, even those who claim to be custodians of the new regime are slaughtering Nepal. They are beheading people, planting booby traps at schools, markets and public places. They are killing and maiming people. Isn’t this the revolution Marx and Lenin talked about?

What kind of political movement is this that believes its expansion is possible only after it kills and punishes as many of its opponents as possible? Isn’t that revolution made by the people? Isn’t that revolution made by the people? Isn’t that revolution made by the people? Isn’t that revolution made by the people?

"Plant bombs wherever possible. Kill people and spread panic, only then will the government lose and we will win," seems to be the Maoist credo. What an easy-going attitude towards human life. And these are the people who talk about building a new Nepal! What a gory thought. How bizarre to believe that you can erect the golden staircase of revolution on a mass grave.

I wish I was killed and not 12-year-old Deepak Gurung. I am 63 years old and it is a downhill from here in terms of my contribution to society. The Maoists in Nepal have been following Mao’s cultural revolution as their role model. But they have overaken Chunu Majumdar when it comes to annihilating our audiences. Majumdar at least had rules about eliminating class enemies. An anti-personal person would first be blacklisted, then the party committee would ratify the selection and under the instruction of the party chief, the military unit would be deployed to execute the person. With their random and arbitrary assassination campaign, Nepali Maoists have overaken Indian Maoists. They are not bothered who is killed in their ambushes and blasts. They have described to the radical of criminal sanction.

There seems to be a widening gap between the ideology of the leadership and the lower ranks. When they came aboveshagrounded, the Maoist leadership promised the people community they would support the free market system. At the same time they even praised the economic reforms in China, and said they would struggle against the Americans who were trying to destroy China by establishing bases in Nepal.

Suddenly, they have now gone back to the cultural revolution as their guiding principle. We see a great contradiction between rhetoric and behaviour within the Maoist fold. If they go on like this they will not just threaten our existence as political entities but also that of our nation.

No cranes

Rajdhani, 15 September

For decades, Siberian cranes have been stopped in Mahottari on their migration route from Siberia to India. But their numbers are falling rapidly because of pesticides. About 500 Siberian cranes have died here in the last year, especially in Gaurahar VDC. Farmers spray pesticides like DDST, phosphates and Meradat on their crops and the cranes feed on insects and pests exposed to the chemicals. There can be anywhere between 7,000-17,000 cranes passing through or nesting here every year.

**What was her fault?**

Madhav Dhungel in Kanchipur, 13 September

Seven-year-old Bhabana was a hardworking third grade student. This year she won Rs 300 for topping her class. It was on the evening of 9 September. Bhabana was playing outside her home in Kalak, 20km south of Patan, when a grenade killed her. Earlier that day four activists and their local commander, Sanj, were returning from Bhattachar and stopped near the ropeway terminal for some food and alcohol. By the time they reached Kalak, Dilip, the bomb specialist, was锥\ abandoned. The Nepaliga, Bhabana’s shop where Dilip decided to teach his junior commanders how to use a grenade. He pulled the pin and threw grenade out of the shop. The shopkeeper was showered with shrapnel but Bhabana, who was running towards her mother, was cut to pieces.

In the ensuing confusion, Dilip escaped. Although he got away, the villagers managed to damage his two boats, the commanders, Sanj and Prabin. By the time the local Maoist administrator Bhim Dwoj arrived, more than 150 villagers had gathered. Dilip dismissed the incident as initial. Involving Naikcs and the results of the village misses, Dilip was killed. They were so angry that they even turned on bystanders who urged restraint.

Dilip left after saying he would bring Dilip along with local Maoist government chief Ram Kumar Syangtam alias Bhashik and the district secretary. The people realised the Maoists after they signed a paper that acknowledged their error. It read: “An accident occurred due to our technical error. We shall give compensation. We shall return to the family in the creation.”

But the next day the Maoists returned, threatening to kill one by one those who had spoken against them. That day in school Rukamj Darlami, his father and brothers from Kalak were abducted. Rukamj managed to escape, but the whereabouts of his father and brothers is not known.

As they Bhabanas are dying every day in Nepal. If her death on the outskirts of the city received so little media attention, we can only imagine what atrocities are going unreported every day. Instead of punishing their activists responsible for the death of a young child, the Maoists returned to her village to abduct the people who asked for justice. What kind of justice can the people demand? And what is the kind of revolution that believes its expansion is possible only after it kills and punishes as many of its opponents as possible?

**kill people and spread panic, only then will the government lose and we will win,** seems to be the Maoist credo. What an easy-going attitude towards human life. And these are the people who talk about building a new Nepal! What a gory thought. How bizarre to believe that you can erect the golden staircase of revolution on a mass grave.

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Friday, 22 April 1977

Sundarijal

There were some unusual activities outside the gate. I saw through the gate chink the white car of the Anchaladish (ass.). I think they have interrogated GM as they did me 4 days ago. Yesterday perhaps Mangalaji has seen GM like Sushila did me before on interrogation. I don't know what GM had said. My line has been not to make any statement to the police in the cases that are pending in court. I hear that GM may not take this line. Moreover, I am for exposing the govt itself in the course of our trial. It will not be we who will be on trial, but the govt itself. Therefore we must reserve our statement, if we have to make any, for the court. In my case they had permitted Ganeshrajji to see me for a while—incidentally no doubt—before the interrogation. I don't know whom Mangalaji has employed as GM's legal adviser—there is nobody better than Ganeshrajji in this type of black out (banja?).

I am waiting, waiting for GM's return to this camp.

Through a gap on the prison gate, BP Koirala has been allowed to interogate Ganesh Man Singh, who is also in solitary confinement at Sundarijal. BP rues the fact that they did not discuss their common position and fears before the interrogation. He is too meek, are not equal to the task of defending the most important politician in the history of Nepal. He is too meek, in the habit of making unnecessarily long speeches and is given to tarts which propensity put up during these months found an outlet in his long speech during the interrogation. I think tomorrow also they will come for him, and I will also have to have meeting with him in light of what GM has said in the interrogation. It was a mistake that we didn't work out jointly the details of the statement we are going to make to either the police or to the court. We had discussed in a very general way the lines of argument of defence that we individually would make. GM may have missed the whole point of the discussion. It is all my conjecture. I may not have said anything to the police to help them to frame the charges—but the fact that there had been a session is ominous. If they come tomorrow also then my pessimistic conjecture would appear convincing. I dread to meet them again—but I am certain that they would come to me one of these days. I know what answer to give but it leaves a hard taste in my mouth to meet them. They are so distrustful. Or I may be wrong, they are good men, perhaps at heart, and I am perhaps not being fair to them. They were courteous to me and if DSP appeared a little official and slightly stiff, it may have been due to the embarrassment. They are good men, I feel a little better since two days there has been no discharge of blood in my epistaxis. Feeling of boredom is no disease. I washed my head and feet and when I wanted to take a regular bath I felt too cold. I propose to bathe tomorrow if the day is warm. My mood is alright. The hidden weakness of my character which I was not aware of outside became evident since my arrest this time. Since the epistaxis I have been feeling positively homesick and lonely, occasionally depressed and subject to melancholic blues. I was never so before. What has happened to weaken my character? I can't attribute my present psychological state to solitary confinement alone because it started with the very moment of imprisonment, before the slow process of adverse effect on my psychology would even start. I will have to discuss this with Shailaja if I will get an opportunity to do it.

As usual, a very dull day.

BP Koirala spies police going in to GM's residence at Sundarijal Saturday, 23 April 1977

Sundarijal

It appears that GM had a 2nd occasion today of police interrogation. He is being subjected to long sessions of interrogation—which means his responses appear to be productive. GM is in the habit of making unnecessarily long speeches and is given to tarts which propensity put up during these months found an outlet in his long speech during the interrogation. I think tomorrow also they will come for him, and I will also have to meet with him in light of what GM has said in the interrogation. It was a mistake that we didn't work out jointly the details of the statement we are going to make to either the police or to the court. We had discussed in a very general way the lines of argument of defence that we individually would make. GM may have missed the whole point of the discussion. It is all my conjecture. I may not have said anything to the police to help them to frame the charges—but the fact that there had been a session is ominous. If they come tomorrow also then my pessimistic conjecture would appear convincing. I dread to meet them again—but I am certain that they would come to me one of these days. I know what answer to give but it leaves a hard taste in my mouth to meet them. They are so distrustful. Or I may be wrong, they are good men, perhaps at heart, and I am perhaps not being fair to them. They were courteous to me and if DSP appeared a little official and slightly stiff, it may have been due to the embarrassment. They are good men, I feel a little better since two days there has been no discharge of blood in my epistaxis. Feeling of boredom is no disease. I washed my head and feet and when I wanted to take a regular bath I felt too cold. I propose to bathe tomorrow if the day is warm. My mood is alright. The hidden weakness of my character which I was not aware of outside became evident since my arrest this time. Since the epistaxis I have been feeling positively homesick and lonely, occasionally depressed and subject to melancholic blues. I was never so before. What has happened to weaken my character? I can't attribute my present psychological state to solitary confinement alone because it started with the very moment of imprisonment, before the slow process of adverse effect on my psychology would even start. I will have to discuss this with Shailaja if I will get an opportunity to do it.

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BOOKWORM

The Critique of the State: Jens Bartelson
Cambridge University Press, 2001
Rs 1,272

What kind of political order would there be in the absence of the state? Bartelson argues that we are currently unable to imagine what might lurk ‘beyond’, because our basic concepts of political order are conditioned by our experience of the state. In this study, he investigates the concepts of the state historically as well as philosophically, considering a range of thinkers and theorists.

ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age
André Gudrun Frank
Vintar Publications, 1998
Rs 896

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SRADDA BASNYAT

Pnan Limbush admits that he submitted his documentary on Kuber Rai, Nepal's lost Adhunakri singer, for Film South Asia 2003 just for fun. He certainly didn’t expect Itihas Jitneharuko Lagi (History Wins) would be picked to open the South Asian documentary film festival next week.

Pnan is self-taught. He spent hours pouring over books borrowed from the British Council and TU, recorded award-winning movies and watched them with a critical eye, getting a feel for how the pros did it. In a modest little flat in the back streets of Patan Durbar, Pranay and some friends set up the production house, RBA Films. Each year, the group puts their savings towards a camera, computer, editing software.

This year, he was finally ready to invest in a film on the award-winning musician, Kuber Rai. It took the 29-year-old six months of hard work to put together a no-frills production using a single camera.

The camera tracks down Kuber Rai digging his field in Ilam. That evening, in his home lit by the flickers of a kerosene lamp, we learn that Kuber is a brilliant vocalist, one of the few who followed the popular Ram Krishna Dhakal in a competition in Kathmandu. Now, several years later, Kuber has enough songs to cut a record and wants to give music another try.

As Kuber’s music unfold in Kathmandu, each time accompanied by the sorrowful tune of a solitary violin, we’re introduced to Dhiraj Rai, a budding pop star.

"When a sweet song hits your ears, your heart palpitates," he says. "When you’re left with echoes in your head, you get a sort of melancholy." Dhiraj takes his music seriously. He believes music is the best escape from the real world.

Kuber adds, "The songs that you like the most are the ones you wrote yourself. That’s the thrill of music." He keeps faith in his music and persevered for 12 years. He kept faith in his music and persevered for 12 years. Times he thought of quitting, but he kept faith in his music and persevered for 12 years.

We become painfully aware of Kuber Rai’s alienation in Kathmandu as he is shunted from one music house to the next, each making empty promises. Arien Robin’s lyrics sound clear: “I don’t know what I am doing in this crazy city. I am completely lost, confused.” The newspapers stack up in Kuber’s room, showing the empty days going by. Sixteen years later, defeated, Kuber decides it’s time to return to his fields in Ilam.

In Kathmandu, he curtains rise for Dhiraj as he proclaims, “History is for winners.”

Dhiraj was intended for Nepali television. “I wanted to make this film for the Nepali masses. I want to encourage young people not to lose hope just because they may be financially weak,” Pranay told us. “If you have the dream, go for it.”

Film South Asia has been holding bi-annual documentary festivals in Kathmandu, and this year 43 films from Pakistan, India, Nepal, Maldives and Sri Lanka will be shown. Festival chairman, Kanak Mani Dixit, explains why Pranay’s film was chosen to open this year’s event: “First, History for Winners is a very well made film, and the alienation a villager feels in urban Kathmandu is a very powerful statement.”

FSA 2003 will open on Thursday 25 September with a keynote address by Indian film director, Mahesh Bhatt, and will continue till 28 September at the Russian Cultural Centre.

www.himalassociation.org/fsa

Kuber Rai back to tilling his field in the closing sequence of Pranay Limbush’s documentary, Itihas Jitneharuko Lagi.

Film South Asia 2003 opens next week with a Nepali documentary on the principles of winning, losing and what it is worth.

Do the dance and make some noise with three Australian lads who are creating quite a stir with their debut album, You Should Be Like This. More often, Danny G. identical twins Tim Taharch and Danny Taharch make PTY LTD performing in the Valley’s post-bandh weekend. Our sister publication, WAVES, interviewed the band about their sound, doing live dance music and how Kathmandu made it onto their world tour.

How would you define your music? PTY LTD: Our music is deep—sophisticated, smooth, sexy, dance music. Our sound is very well known in America and Australia so there’s it’s quite easy to define our genre which is called West Coast House.

How different is that from seeing a DJ spin?

It is improved but structured. A DJ can’t extend a killer track for another two minutes but we can! We always have a great time when we play and love to get the audience involved as much as we can.

How did you decide to ‘do’ Kathmandu?

We always wanted to take our music overseas. When we got the opportunity to travel to Kathmandu, we jumped—we were totally excited. Plus we heard the people in Kathmandu are all good looking! It’s easy to organise to play in major cities around the world, like London and New York, but Kathmandu is something very different.

We hear that ‘Who’s been watching you’, a single from your album that American DJ Derrick Carter remixed, is burning up the dance charts. Is that why PTY LTD are headed there?

After Kathmandu we are heading to Europe for a showcase event and then onto America, where we have had recent #1’s on the American dance charts. We went to New York last year and did some quick promo shows to support our vinyl releases.

Is there any eastern instrument in your repertoire?

No, but we will taking a serious mobile recording system with us to collaborate with musicians over here. We hope to meet some local musicians at the WAVE event. We will be recording in the studio in Kathmandu with some local musicians if they are up for it.

Wow! Recording as you go...that sounds awesome.

It is something that we always wanted to do—capture sounds of different cultures and people and record them. We will be travelling with a documentary maker and will be releasing a DVD when we return from America.

Catch PTY LTD at:

- Club Platinum from 8PM on 21 September. Yak & Yeti Hotel
- Wavevent at Yala Maya Kendra 4 PM on 21 September
- Jatra 6-10 PM 24 September Club Platinum from 8PM on 21 September
- Jatra 6-10 PM 24 September Club Platinum
- Enter Lounge-A-Rama 4PM onwards 26 September at Hotel del Annapurna
WE HAVE LOST ALL HOPE

RAMESWAR BOHRA

THERE WILL BE NO DASAI FOR NEPALIS ONCE MORE FORCED TO FLEE THE FIGHTING IN THE MIDWESTERNS.

“We have lost all hope”

D asai is a time for homecoming when there are long lines at the border crossing of Rupedia. This year, the Nepalis are going in the other direction: fleeing to India to escape fighting after the ceasefire broke down three weeks ago.

Many of them had returned from India after the ceasefire went into effect, only to be displaced again. Most of them are men, and they say farewell to family members and friends who have come down from the hills to see them off at the border. The good byes are brief and perfunctory. There are tears, and faces are downcast. Most don’t look back at Nepal after they cross the border with all their belongings in white fertiliser sacks.

“After all these years, I had hoped to celebrate Dasai in peace with all my family but have to run away to save myself,” says Dhabit Giri from Kalaguan in Salyan, a Maoist stronghold. Giri had come back from India after five years and was looking forward to getting to know his family again. But the end of the ceasefire meant he couldn’t stay on. “I’m lucky to be alive, some of my friends were not so fortunate,” he adds. We don’t talk in whose hands his friends had died. Somehow, it doesn’t seem to matter.

After January, many Nepalis came back from India to their home districts of Salyan, Dang, Pyuthan and Jajarkot. They had left their wives, parents and children to get along the best they could amidst the insurgency. The little money they sent home took care of their loved ones. But just before this season of celebrations, as the conflict flared up again, they had to leave again. “If I stay here, I’ll get killed,” says Shiba Acharya from Jajarkot matter of factly. “What other choice do I have besides running away from home?”

Harka Bahadur BK got a month-long leave from his job in India, but had to leave his family after a few days when the ceasefire broke down and he felt it would be safer to cut his vacation short and leave. “It’s not safe at home anymore, that’s why I’m leaving,” he told us just before crossing over to catch a bus in India. Six other fellow-villagers are with Harka Bahadur. They mutter that it is better to leave than to face the wrath of the Maoists and the harassment of the army.

After the ceasefire, many young men from the Maoist heartland in western Nepal were keen to join the army and police force. Many fled the Maoists’ forced recruitment drives and preferred to join the army. But the military is suspicious of young men from the mid-western hills, and very few got through the screening process. Now, those who didn’t get enlisted are in much greater danger from the Maoists as word spreads that they had tried to join the army.

“I left home to join the army, but they didn’t take me in. If I return, I’m sure the Maoists will kill me,” says Raju Singh Sejuwal from Hatsinja in Jumla. Raju is among another small group with rucksacks crossing the border at Nepalganj last week.

While most are single men or groups of men from the same village, increasingly there are entire families leaving. Pari Adhikari has left Jajarkot with her wife and two children. “We have lost all hope, that’s why I’m taking my whole family,” he told us.

Many families leave home out of fear; others are relatives of kidnapped villagers who have been ordered out. Public notices are posted in the villages threatening death to families that don’t leave.

Basanta Shrestha’s family in Pipara VDC in Banka was preparing for Dasai when Maoists asked him for Rs 150,000. He failed to produce the amount, and was kidnapped by Maoists. The next morning, a public notice at the local market ordered his family to leave the village or face death.

Last year, when the war was raging, the number of migrants to India was estimated to be around 1,500 every day according to records at Jumluwala police check post here. After the ceasefire, the outflow stopped and the traffic was in the opposite direction with many Nepalis returning home. Now it has reversed once more. “We see many families leaving these days,” says Rani Bahadur Thapa, police-in-charge. The estimate is that at least 2,000 leave every day.
War spending threatens to squeeze US foreign aid

The US administration’s most recent request to Congress hand over funds for ongoing military operations in Iraq and pressure from tax-cut, economic recession and previous spending on the war on terrorism, has made economists doubt if the government can fulfill its commitments to foreign aid and overseas development.

Last week, the administration said it would request $87 billion more to fund military operations and the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan for 2004. This request comes on top of some $79 billion approved by Congress earlier this year and would bring spending for the two years to $166 billion out of US taxpayers’ pockets, further crowding the current budget deficit.

That deficit has been fueled mostly by the administration’s tax cuts and the large increase in defence spending associated with the self-styled war on terrorism since 11 September 2001. Economists here are further alarmed by looming demands on the US budget. They say that the arrival of the baby-boom generation is going to put still greater pressure on the social security system and government-financed health care expenditure.

All that would inflate the deficit, estimated at $401 billion for 2004, the largest budget deficit this rich country has ever known.

Under the best-case scenario predicted by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) two weeks ago, the cumulative deficit would reach $2.3 trillion over the 10 years ending in 2015. The office said earlier this month that this year’s deficit would be $401 billion, an increase of $159 billion over what was projected in March. Next year’s deficit was projected to be $480 billion, but with the Iraq request announced by President George W Bush last week, the deficit will climb to $560 billion or higher, moving it closer to a value equivalent to five per cent of gross domestic product, a benchmark that many economists consider a danger zone for the economy. This is not only bad news for the US economy, but for nations expecting assistance from Washington.

There will be a real squeeze on other international aid, “and last Brenda,” of the Brookings Institution, commenting on whether the United States will be able to fulfill its promise on funding for HIV/AIDS, foreign aid and its new Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) for overseas development. The administration, and some development groups, consider the MCA as a new approach that would grant money to nations that demonstrate a commitment to remaking their justice systems, spending more on education and health, and adopting market-opening measures.

“Certainly on the Millennium Challenge Accounts—that looks very unlikely,” Brainard said at a recent Brookings seminar. “And to what looked like a very strong hand a year ago is now, I think, increasingly going to be coming into question on the part of other countries who are looking to those resources to help them undertake their development plans.”

The cash crunch looks likely to whittle away at other aid promises. In May, Bush signed a bill to give $15 billion, including $10 billion in newly pledged money—over five years to fight HIV/AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean. He called the plan “the largest, single up-front commitment in history for an international public health initiative involving a specific disease.”

The AIDS money comes on top of the president’s announcement in March of $2.3 trillion over the 10 years ending two weeks ago, the cumulative deficit would be $1.6 trillion by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) later this month, through a proposed hike of $10 billion for the MCA. But now with the $87 billion request for Iraq, economists say that Congress faces limited options, which include plans to cut back requests for the MCA and other foreign aid projects substantially.

“At the present time, the administration and the Congress have essentially no forward-looking plans or policies to deal with this set of looming problems,” said Ralph C Bryer of the Brookings Institution at the same seminar. The president has requested $1.8 billion for foreign aid in the midst of reports that Congress could drastically cut that to trim the deficit.

Development groups have responded with alarm. On Tuesday, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) issued a statement calling on Bush to ensure full funding for the fights against global poverty, MCA and HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. “People’s lives depend on presidential action now,” said Bill O’Keefe, senior director of policy and advocacy for CRS.

The hawks fall out

ANALYSIS by JIM LOBE

Faced with the rising costs and complications of occupying Iraq, the hard-line coalition around US President George W Bush that led the drive to war with Iraq appears to be suffering serious internal strain.

On the one hand, neo-conservatives, who were the most optimistic about post-war Iraq before the US-led invasions, are insisting that Washington cannot afford either to pull out or to surrender the slightest control over the occupation to the United Nations or anyone else. To a rising chorus of calls by Democrats for Washington to invite the world body to at least take over political control of the transition to Iraqi rule in exchange for a commitment of money and peacekeepers, the neo-cons are urging the administration to send more US troops instead.

Pentagon chief Donald Rumsfeld, on the other hand, is dead-set against deploying yet more troops to join the 180,000 now in Iraq and Kuwait, while his, like the neo-cons, opposes conceding any substantial political role for the UN or anyone else. His preferred option is to transfer power directly to the Iraqis as quickly as possible, even at the risk that reconstituted security forces would be insufficiently cleansed of elements of the former regime’s Baath Party.

“It’s clear now that Rumsfeld is not interested in remaking Iraq,” said Charles Kupchan, foreign-policy analyst at the Council on Foreign Relations. “He wants to get the hell out of there.”

The growing divide between the two groups emerged publicly over the past month, as Secretary of State Colin Powell, backed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, appeared to persuade Bush and his national security adviser Condoleezza Rice that the financial costs of the occupation and the strain it was putting on US military forces were simply too much for Washington to bear on its own or with the support of Britain and the other members of the current “coalition of the willing.”

Key Republican lawmakers brought back much the same message from the August recess. They reported that their constituents were increasingly concerned about how badly things appeared to be going in Iraq. As a result, Bush gave Powell the authority to negotiate a new UN Security Council resolution that would lighten the load on Washington, even if that meant giving up substantial control over the occupation. The only caveat was that the US military retain complete control over security.
Car toons

Have you noticed lately that cars are starting to resemble humans? Give it another million years of evolution, and automobiles will shed their hightails and start walking around on two hind legs. In the old days, when they designed cars, they got a box and attached four wheels. These days, they take a Miss Universe and add an internal combustion engine with T-bone McPherson struts.

This is why we see cars with grinning radiator grilles, cars with double chins, cars with big bosoms, cars with body-coloured waistline moulding, cars with cute behinds, cars that greet you and obey voice commands, cars that throw tantrums and refuse to start unless you tickle them behind their carburettors.

Today’s anthropogetic car designers strive to endow their creations with human attributes. So much so, that some cars even have sex. No, they don’t mate in the garage when the lights go out (not that I am aware of, anyway) I mean cars these days are actually gender-differentiated. There are cars that are definitely male, there are cars that are definitely female, and there are cars that are definitely both.

Take the new Proteon Waja, for instance. With its protuberant Y-front crushable bonnet, this is an unmistakably masculine machine that likes to run around in its panties. Or the Toyota Quincal which in profile bears striking resemblance to Daler Mehndi, and a car that would actually look good in a turban. But for existing nonsense from every pore, there is nothing to beat the ultimate he-car: that stud from the Mahindra stable, the Scorpio. The Scorpio is to automobiles what Arnold Schwarzenegger is to the California gubernatorial elections.

There are some perfectly good cars that will never get over the burden of silly names that end in ‘o’, like the Terrano, Tuxedo or Tornado. There is also a new trend of naming cars after Hollywood box office hits, like The Matrix. What next? Cyberbull or Kangomurkey? Auto makers seem to be running out of ideas, so here are some suggestions for the cars of tomorrow.

Hydra H:0: The first hydrogen fuelled car to be introduced into Nepal which will fail police emission tests because sour contents in the exhaust are below permissible limits. Also, the Hydra’s fuel cells can’t run on the adulterated water in Kathmandu’s mains.

Libido SX: Ideal car for lovelorn, seats that recline fully to turn cars into a honeymoon suite with Torsion-type roll control device and telescop shock absorbers. The 16-valve multi-point fuel injection system gives you more power and faster pick-up.

Editora 1200L: The only car in its class especially built for handle, harsha and disha jam. Comes with brick-proof tuffon windscreens, armoured tumet with forward-mounted 7.5 mm cannon and side-firing rocket launchers. Wheels optional.

Under My Hat

by Kunda Dixit

Keshari’s children

The 8-year-old boy was walking home from school when a gang of older children blindsided him, marched him off and robbed him, before offering him drugs. After the older children left, the terrified boy stumbled back to the one place where he felt safe—his school.

This incident was the last straw for Keshari Ghale, principal of Bal Bikash at Chhetrapati. She set up a ground-breaking after-school program to protect her students from harm even when school is officially over for the day. It was yet another in a long line of challenges that Keshari has risen to in the 12 years since she became principal of the primary school in inner-city Kathmandu.

This used to be a typical government school—underfunded and uncared for—but today Bal Bikash is a beacon to students and staff all over the capital.

Keshari explains her vision with simple logic: “I have spent a lot of years in the school, so it’s as if the children are my children. They are the future. If the children are spoilt, how will the country be protected? If I protect the children and give them knowledge, then maybe one day they can become our country’s leaders.”

When Keshari became school principal, the first challenge was the school buildings themselves: crumbling, dark and dangerous. Now, Bal Bikash is a bright and airy place with walls covered in murals and children’s drawings. This brightness is reflected in the happy attitude of both the children and the teachers. The teachers were, at Keshari’s initiation, the first to receive training from the organisation, Educate the Children. Keshari’s efforts have been noted by the Ministry of Education, which has awarded her with a medal.

But Keshari refuses to rest on her laurels. She is obsessed with saving her children from the bad influences in the area. “Their parents are very busy, and it is after school that I want to protect the children from bad company.” With her brother, Keshari also runs Education Development for Underprivileged Children of Nepal and raises money for her after-school activities, although funding remains difficult to find.

On a typical afternoon in Bal Bikash you can find grade four and five children working with great dedication on their wood crafts. Grade two plays board games, and grade three is even learning Japanese. The program doesn’t just protect the children, but gives them an opportunity to do fun activities for which there is no time during normal school hours.

When we asked Keshari what motivates her, she seemed surprised at the question, her dedication is completely natural. “I still have much to do, the dedication is completely natural. I’m surprised at the question, her what motivates her, she seemed surprised at the question, her dedication is completely natural. ‘I still have much to do; the dedication is completely natural. I still have much to do, the dedication is completely natural. “I still have much to do, the dedication is completely natural. “I still have much to do, the dedication is completely natural. I still have much to do, the dedication is completely natural. “I still have much to do, the dedication is completely natural. I still have much to do, the dedication is completely natural. “I still have much to do, the dedication is completely natural.

“Your children need a lot of help,” she says. (Harish Tims)